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The ATHEIST's Objection,
That we can have no Idea of G O D,
R E F U T E D.

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the
CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of *St. Paul,*
February the 7th 1698.

B E I N G
The Second of the L E C T U R E for that Year,
Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle, Esq;*

By *JOHN HARRIS, M. A.*
and Fellow of the ROYAL-SOCIETY.

L O N D O N,
Printed by *J. L.* for *Richard Wilkin,* at the
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THE ATHEIST'S CATECHISM
THE NEW EDITION
REVISED

SERMON

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PAUL
February the 7th 1804
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The Second of the Lectures for that Year
Preached by the Honorable Robert Hall, Esq.

BY JOHN HARRIS, M.A.
and Fellow of the Royal Society

LONDON
Printed by J. L. for J. and W. Smith, at the
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The Wicked, through the Pride of his Countenance, will not seek after God; neither is God in all his Thoughts.

IN these words, I have, in a former Discourse, taken notice of these Three Particulars:

- I. The General Character or Qualifications of the Person here mentioned, which is, *That he is a Wicked Man.*
- II. The Particular Kind of Wickedness, or Origin from whence the Spirit of Atheism and Irreligion doth chiefly proceed, and that is Pride; *The Wicked, through the Pride of his Countenance, &c.*
- III. The great Charge which the Psalmist brings against the Person here spoken of in my Text, *viz. Wilful Atheism and Infidelity; He will not seek after God, neither is God in all his Thoughts.*

The Two first of these I have already dispatch'd, and therefore shall now proceed to discourse on my Third Head, *viz.*

The great Charge here brought against this Wicked Person, *That he will not seek after God; neither is God in all his Thoughts:* or, as it is in the Margin, with good grounds (as I have before observed) from the Hebrew, *All his Thoughts are, There is no God.*

Which appears to me to imply a wilful and malicious slighting and contemning of God, and his Laws, and an endeavour to banish the very Thoughts of his Existence out of their Minds. And under this Head, I shall make it my business to enumerate all the pretended Arguments and Objections which I have met with, and are of any weight, against the Being of a God, in general; and then endeavour to shew how Weak and Inconclusive they are, and how miserable a Support they will prove for Atheism and Infidelity.

But first it will be necessary, briefly to clear up one Point, and to obviate one Objection that may be made against this very Attempt of mine, of Refuting and Answering the Atheists Arguments and Objections.

It will, I doubt not, be said, That there is not now, nor ever perhaps was in the World, any such Person as a *Speculative Atheist*, or one that believes, there is no God. It is said, with great assurance, by some, That the Ancient Atheists were only such as declared against the Plurality of Gods, and the Idolatry and Superstition of the Heathen Worship. And we are told by one, very lately, (a) *That he hath travelled many Countries, and could never meet with any Atheists, (which are few, if any;) and all the Noise and Clamour, saith he, is against Castles in the Air.*

To which I Answer, That nothing can be more plain and clear, than that both Ancient and Modern Writers do give us an account of such Persons as were known and reputed Atheists, by those that were Contemporary with them, and did well understand their Principles and Tenets. I need not insist on Proofs
from

(a) Two Essays from Oxford, in the Apology.

from any of the Ancient Christian Writers ; for 'tis sufficient, that *Plato, Diogenes Laertius, Plutarch, Cicero*, and many others, do acquaint us, that such kind of Men there have been in the World. Tho' I shall particularly produce the Testimony of two Authors, one ancient, and the other, 'tis probable, now living, to prove this Point ; and these are, *Sextus Empiricus*, and he that wrote the *Thoughts on the Comet that appeared in the Year 1680*. *Sextus* is express, (a) That *Diagoras Melius, Prodicus Chius, Eumemerus, Critias Atheniensis, Theodorus*, and many others, were absolute Atheists, and denied that there were any Gods at all. And the French Gentleman (b) saith the same of most of those mentioned by *Sextus*, and other Ancient Writers ; and to the number, adds some others of a Modern date : And Mr. *Blount* saith, (c) that the *Epicureans* constantly affirmed, there were no Gods. Now the Evidence of these Authors will, I hope, be allowed, because they seem Well-wishers to the Cause of Infidelity themselves. To these I might add, were it necessary, That *Vannius* himself tells us frequently of Atheists that he met with, (and no one will doubt but that he knew where to find one at any time,) and he calls *Ma-chiavel*, expressly, *Atheorum facile Princeps* (d.) But indeed, this Assertion of these Gentlemen, That there is no such thing as an Atheist in the World, is like most other things that they advance, Uncertain and Precarious, and often contradicted by what at other times they deliver : for though they are sometimes, and in some Companies, for Reasons that are very obvious, unwilling to take the Title of *Atheist* on themselves or their Party ; yet they are often ready

(a) Adv. Ma-
them. p 317,
318, &c. Ge-
neva, 1621.

(b) Penſees di-
verses à l' Oc-
caſion de la Co-
mete, Tom. 2.
ſ. clxxiv.
p. 531.

(c) Anim. Mand.
p. 96.

(d) Ambro-
ſiæ. D. Pro-
videntia, p. 35.

ready enough to bestow it on others ; and when it is
(a) Vid. Blount's Translation of the Life of Apollonius, p. 34. subservient to their purpose, will insinuate, (a) That the greatest Lights and Teachers of the Church believe as little of Religion as themselves. But I say also,

2. That 'tis one thing to disbelieve the Existence of a God, and another to declare so to the World. And it doth not at all follow, that a Man is not an Atheist, because he doth not openly profess himself to be so, at all times, and in all Companies. There are no Writers so insincere as these kind of Gentlemen ; they are very cautious and tender how they expose themselves to the just Punishment of the Law. *Vaninus* himself, though he did at last suffer Death madly, for his Infidelity, (as one (b) saith of him, that died as madly himself,) yet is he very cautious and careful, in his Writings, how he renders himself obnoxious to the Censure of the *Inquisition* ; and he declares,

(b) *Anima mundi*, in the Oracle of Reason, p. 54.

(c) *Amphitheatr.* p. 151, 334. Lugdun. 1615.

(c) That he will submit all things to the Judgment of the *Roman Church*. So a Gentleman of our own Nation, though he endeavours, as effectually as 'tis possible, under-hand, to ridicule and undermine Religion ; yet he would fain appear to the World to be a good Christian, and one that hath a mighty Veneration for God and his Laws : but, in the mean time, 'tis very easie to discover his true Principles and Design ; for he declares, (d) That he thinks it much safer to believe as the Church believes, and to pin his Faith always on my Lord of Canterbury's Sleeve, as he saith he will do, and subscribe to any ridiculous Legend, rather than incur the Censure of the *Papish Clergy* ; as he basely calls the Ministers of this most Excellent *Protestant Church* : for the same laudable Reasons also, he forbears communicating, what he doth

(d) Blount's Translation of Philostratus's Life of Apollonius, in the Preface.

doth, or ought to think Truth, to Mankind, (as he tells us in many places.) Now if this be the case with these *Men of Honour*, that they dare not speak their Minds, nor discover their true Sentiments plainly to the World; we must by no means conclude over-hastily of their *Orthodoxy*, by what they say in Discourse at *some times*, or publish in Print at *others*: but, in short, if they set up such a Notion of a God, as is essentially inconsistent with the *Idea* that all Mankind have of such a Being; if they make him either a Necessary Agent, or a Blind, Idle and Un-active One; if they divest him of his Providence, or cramp him in his Attributes, as those that call themselves *Deists* generally do: in a word, if they make him such an Impotent and Careless Being, as either cannot or will not govern the World, give Laws to his People, vindicate his own Honour, and punish and reward Men according to their Actions: 'Tis plain, I say, that though in *words* they may profess to believe and honour a God, yet in *reality* they deny him, and have no manner of Notion of his true Nature and Perfections. But 'tis not the *Name* only, nor the empty Sound of the word *Deity*, but the *Thing*, that is wanting in the World; 'tis the true Knowledge and Belief of *this* only, that can clear a Man from the imputation of Atheism: If he be not right in this Point, *i. e.* if he have not such a belief of God, as implies in it a knowledge of the Perfections of his Nature, he may call himself by as *fine* and *fashionable* Names as he pleases, and pretend to *Deism* and *Natural Religion*; but in reality he is an *Atheist*, and so ought to be esteemed by all Mankind; for as one saith, (a) that knew very well what an Atheist was, *Such are Atheists,*

(a) Blount's
Anima Mundi,
in Oracles of
Reason, Prett.

(b) *Amphitheatr.* p. 124.

(c) *Pag.* 152.

Atheists, as deny God's Providence; or who restrain it in some particulars, and exclude it in reference to others, as well as those who directly deny the Existence of a Deity: And Vaninus (b) calls Tully Atheist, on this very account; and in another place, he saith, (c) That to deny a Providence, is the same thing as to deny a God.

This therefore being returned in Answer to the Objection, That there is no such thing as an Atheist: Let us now go about to examine and consider the Arguments and Objections that are usually brought by Atheistical Men, against the Being of a God. And these, one would think, should be exceeding weighty ones, and no less than *direct Demonstrations*; for if they are not such strenuous Proofs as are impossible to be refuted, I'm sure the Atheist ought to pass for the most senseless and stupid of all Mankind. He slights and despises that inestimable Offer of being Happy for ever; he runs the risque of being eternally Miserable; he bids open defiance to the Laws of God and Man; and he opposes his own Opinion and Judgment, to the sober and considerate Sentiments of the judicious part of Mankind, in all Ages of the World. Now surely, in such a case, he ought to be very sure that he cannot be mistaken; and to be as demonstratively certain, as of the truth of any *Theorem* in *Euclid*, that there is no God, no Moral Good nor Evil, no Revealed Religion, nor any Future State of Rewards and Punishments. But can any Man have the face to pretend to this? Will not the common sense of all Mankind pronounce this impossible? and that a Demonstration of the *Non-Existence* of these things, is not to be obtained? Can any one be directly assured, that there

there is not so much as a *Possibility* that these things should be true? And if so, then 'tis plain, that for any thing he can directly prove to the contrary, the Atheist may be in the wrong, and consequently be Eternally damned and miserable. Now would any one, that can think at all, run this Dreadful Hazard much less sure, one that pretends to be a Man of *Penetration* and *Judgment*, and to Philosophize above the *Vulgar*: And yet this every Atheist doth; and that too on no other Grounds but the Strength of some trifling Objections against, and seeming Absurdities in, the Notion of a God, and Religion, which the Extravagant Wit of wicked Men hath invented and coined to stop the Mouths of those that reprove them, to stifle and bear down the Stings of Conscience, and to gain some pretence to Reason and Principles in their Impious Proceedings. But surely these Persons must know well enough, that 'tis a very easie thing to start Objections against the most plain and obvious Truths; They know also, that in other Cases, themselves think it very unreasonable to disbelieve the truth of a Thing, *only* because they can't readily answer all the Objections a witty Man may bring against it, and because they cannot solve all the *Phænomena* of it. Now, why should not they proceed so in Matters of Religion? They know that all the great Truths of it, have been demonstrated over and over, by those Learned and Excellent Persons which have written in the Defence of it; Nay, they know too, that most of their Objections have been already refuted and answered, and that they adhere to a Cause that hath been frequently baffled. They know the weight and importance of

the Subject, and that if Religion should at last prove to be true, they must be for ever Miserable : All this, I say, they very well know ; and therefore it looks strangely like an Infatuation upon them, that they will run this Dreadful Hazard only on the Strength of a few *Objections*, and a bare surmise only that there is no such thing as a God or Religion. These *Objections* are their only Hold and Pretence that they can stick to and abide by, and *what* and how Great they are, I shall now proceed to Examine. These I shall take in their Natural Order : And,

1. Consider such *Objections* as are brought against the Being of a God in General.

2. Such as are alledged against his Attributes and Perfections.

3. Such as are advanced against the Truth and Authority of revealed Religion. The Groundlessness and Inconclusiveness of all which I shall endeavour as clearly as I can to Demonstrate.

And First, I shall consider and refute the *Objections* and Arguments that are brought against the Being of God in General ; and these are (as far as I can find) all reducible to these two Heads. It is said,

1. That we can have no Idea of God.

2. That the Notion of a Deity owes its Original, either to the foolish Fears of some Men, or the Crafty Designs of others.

I shall at this Time handle the *former* of these, and Refute the *Objections* that are brought against the Existence of a Deity, from our not being able (as they say) to have any *Idea* or *Notion* of him. The Atheist alledges, That whatsoever is Unconceivable

ceivable is really nothing at all : that we can have no Idea, or possible Notion of any thing that is not some how or other an Object of our Senses ; for *all Knowledge is Sense* : and we can only judge of the Existence of things by its Evidence and Testimony. Now God is by Divines said to be *Incomprehensible, Infinite, and Invisible* ; i. e. Something that 'tis impossible to know any thing about ; that is every where, and yet no where ; that sees every thing, ^{*Leviathan,*} _{p. 208.} and yet no body can see him ; nor can we perceive any thing of him by any other of our Senses : We cannot tell what to make of such an Account as this of a God ; we can have no Phantasm, Idea or Conception of any such Thing ; and therefore we justly conclude, There is no such Being in Nature. And as for that precarious Notion of a God, that is so much talk'd of in the World, 'tis nothing but a meer *Phantome* or *Morme* devised and set up by Politick and Designing Men to keep the Rabble in awe, and to scare such Fools as are afraid of their own Shadows. The several Points of this Objection, I shall singly consider ; and,

As to the First Part of it, That what we cannot attain any Idea of ; or, That what is *absolutely Unconceivable*, is really *nothing* at all ; perhaps it may be true, taking it in the most strict and proper sense of the words ; for though I am not of *Protagoras's* Mind, that Man is *without conception unless* yet as I think, that That which is *absolutely Unconceivable in its own Nature*, is not possible to be Existent ; so *what is absolutely so to us*, we can know nothing at all of, nor reason, nor argue about it ; since there is no doing of this but from our Ideas. But I cannot

see how this will be advantageous at all to the Cause of Infidelity : For there is neither any one that asserts, nor is the Atheist able to prove, that That Being which we call God, is *absolutely Unconceivable*. There is a vast difference between a thing's being *Unconceivable*, and *Incomprehensible*; Between our having *no Idea at all* of a thing, and our having an *Imperfect* one; and between our knowing *Nothing at all* of a Being, and our comprehending all the *Possible Perfections* and Excellencies of such a Being. We readily grant that the Immense Nature of God is incomprehensible to our finite Understandings; but we don't say 'tis absolutely *Unconceivable*, and that we can know nothing at all about it. The common Notion (c) which all Mankind have of a God, is a sufficient Refutation of this Part of the Objection, as it is also a very good Proof of the real Existence of a Deity; for if there were no such Being, 'tis impossible to conceive how any Idea of him could ever have come into any one's Mind, as I shall hereafter more largely prove.

(c) Sextus Empiricus allows, that there is *κατὰ φύσιν*, a common Notion or Idea of a God, even when he disputes against him. *Adv.*
Math. p. 333.

2. There is implied in this Objection, That we can have no *possible Idea, nor Notion of the Existence of any thing that is not the Object of our Senses*: And from hence these Sublime Thinkers argue against the Existence of a Deity, and conclude there is no God, because they cannot see him, and because he is not perceivable by any of our Bodily Senses. Thus one of our Modern Atheistical Writers asserts, *That the only Evidence we can have of the Existence of any thing, is from Sense*. And in another place, (a) *Whatsoever we can conceive (saith he) hath been perceived first by Sense, either at once, or in Parts, and a Man can have*

(a) Hob's *Leviath.* p. 11.

no Thought representing any thing not subject to Sense. And he defines *Sense* to be *Original Knowledge*. Which is but the Reverse of what *Protagoras*, long ago determin'd: for *Plato*, in his *Theatetus*, tells us, That he defined all *Knowledge* to be *Sense*. Now, is not this admirable Philosophy? and worthy of those that pretend to a sublimer pitch of Knowledge than the *Vulgar*? There is no *Knowledge*, say they, but *Sense*. If so, then, as *Protagoras* saith, all *Sense* must be *Knowledge*; and consequently, he that sees, hears, smells or feels any thing, must immediately know all that is to be known about it: By seeing the Letters of any Language, or hearing the Words pronounced, a Man or a Beast must needs understand all the Sense and Meaning of it; and the Philosophick Nature of all Bodies will be perfectly comprehended, as soon as ever they once come within the reach of our Senses. This is, indeed, a good easie method of attaining Learning; and perhaps very suitable to the Genius of these Gentlemen! But I cannot account from this Notion, how they come to have so much more Penetration and Knowledge than their Neighbours. Are their Eyes and Ears, Noses and Feeling, so much more accurate than those of the *Vulgar*? Yes, doubtless, these are truly *Men of Sense*: their *Lyncean Eyes* can penetrate *Mill-stones*, and the least silent whisper of Nature moves the Intelligent Drum of their tender Ears; nothing escapes their Knowledge, but what is undiscoverable by the nicest Sense, and can only be comprehended by Reason. Reason! an *Ignis Fatuus* of the Mind, whose uncertain Direction they scorn to follow, while this *Light of Nature, Sense*, can be their Guide. Nor will it avail them to alledge here, that

that when they say, we have no Knowledge but what we have from our Senses ; they mean only, that all our Knowledge comes in that way, and not by *Innate Idea's* : for the Author I have mentioned above, is express, that *we can have no thought of any thing not subject to Sense* ; that *the only Knowledge we have of the Existence of all things, is from Sense* ; and that *Sense is Original Knowledge*. And if so, there can be no such thing as comparing or distinguishing of *Idea's* in our Mind ; but the simple *Idea's* of Sensible Objects being impressed upon our Brain, must needs convey to us, by that means, all the Knowledge that we can ever obtain about them, and that as soon too as ever the Objects are perceived. But than this, nothing can be more false and absurd : for 'tis plain, that by our bare Sensations of Objects, we know nothing at all of their Natures. Our Mind, indeed, by these Sensations, is vigorously excited to enquire further about them : but this we could by no means do, if *Sense* were the *highest Faculty* and Power in our Natures, and we were quite devoid of a *Reasoning and Thinking Mind*. This, *Democritus* of old was very well aware of, (however he comes now to be deserted by the Modern Atheistick Writers,) for saith he, (a) *There is in us two kinds of Knowledges ; one Dark and Obscure, which is by the Senses ; the other Genuine and Proper, which is by the Mind*.

And nothing can be more plain, than that we have certain Knowledge of the Existence of many things, which never were, nor perhaps can possibly be the Objects of our Bodily Senses. *Protagoras* himself saith,

(a) Γνώμης δὲ
δύο εἶδη ἰσχυρὰ
ἢ μὲν ὀφθαλμοῖς,
ἢ δὲ λογισμῷ.
Vid. Sext. Em-
piric. adv. Ma-
them. p. 164.

(b) Sext. Emp. (b) Ἀρκεῖ με μόνον αὐτῆς τῆς αἰσθητικῆς ἐπιστήμης ἐπὶ τοῖς ὄντιν ἄλλοι ὁμῶνται, οὐδὲν δὲ δυνάμει ἀκριβὲς τῶν

ταῖν χειρῶν λαβέειν, πᾶν τὸ ἀόρατον ἐκ ἀποδοχέμεναι,
ὡς ἐν ὁσίᾳς μέλει: Take heed that none of the Uninitiated
hear you, who are such as think nothing to Exist, but
what they can lay hold of with their Hands; and who
will not allow any thing that is Invisible, to have a place
among Beings.

The Epicurean Atheist must needs grant the Existence of his *Atoms*, and his *Empty Space*; when yet they must be *both* acknowledged to be no way sensible. Those that hold a Soul or Life in Matter, Plastically diffused through all Parts of the Universe, by which all things are actuated and regulated, cannot deny but this Power is Invisible, and no way the Object of Bodily Sense. Nay, those that assert a Corporeal Deity, and say, that nothing can possibly exist but Body; must needs own, that something of this Deity, as his *Wisdom*, *Power* and *Understanding*, which is certainly the Chief and most Noble of all his Essence, can no ways fall under our Bodily Senses. Let him that asserts, That what is not the Object of Sense, is really nothing at all; let him tell me, if he ever saw that *Power*, *Faculty*, *Understanding* or *Mind*, by which he is enabled to make such a Determination? That there is such a Power or Mind in him, 'tis impossible for him to doubt or deny: for that very *doubting* and *denying*, will *refute* him; and must convince him, that there must be something in him of a *Real Nature*, that can thus Think and Consider, Doubt and Deny; and at last conclude, That there is *nothing Actually Existent*, but what is *Sensible*: For what is *really* and *absolutely* Nothing, can never Think, Consider, Doubt or Determine.

Now let him call this Mind or Soul of his what he

he pleases, I do not here consider its Nature; let it be a Substance distinct from Matter, be it a happy Combination of Animal Spirits; or the brisk Agitation of any fine and subtile Parts of Matter, 'tis all one to our present purpose, it certainly *Exists*, or *is*; and yet is it by no means an Object of Sense, For Animal Spirits, Motion, and the finest and subtilest Parts of Matter are no more sensible to us *now*; than an Incorporeal Substance is. And as he is thus assured that there is something real in himself, which yet is the Object of none of his Senses; so he cannot but conclude the same of other Men that are round about him, that they also have a Soul or Mind of the same Nature: for he must know and be satisfied, that they can *think, reason, doubt, affirm, deny* and *determine*, as well as himself. Now, if he must grant that there are on this Account many things existent in the World; which do no way fall under the cognisance of our Senses, it will be strangely senseless and ridiculous to argue against the Being of a God from *His* not being so; and to deny that there is *any such thing*, because he cannot see *Him* with his Bodily Eyes, because he cannot feel *Him* with his Hands, and hear the Sound of his Voice actually speaking from Heaven. For the Existence of that Divine Being whom *no Eye hath seen, nor can see*, is as plainly demonstrable from Reason and Nature, from his visible Works in the World, and from the inward Sentiments of our unprejudiced Minds, as the Being of our *Own* and *Others* Minds is from the power of thinking and reasoning that we find in our selves and them.

3. But Thirdly, 'tis objected further, (a) That we cannot have any Idea of God, and consequently may conclude, There is no such Being; because he is, by Divines, said to be Incomprehensible and Infinite: (That is, say they) something which we can know nothing at all about; for we cannot have any Phantasm or Conception of any such thing. Thus saith that famous Atheistical Writer, Whatever we know, we learn from our Phantasms; but there is no Phantasm of Infinite; and therefore no Knowledge or Conception of it. No Man, saith he, can have in his mind an Image of Infinite Power or Time: And there is no Conception or Idea of that which we call Infinite. In another place, he asserts, (c) That the Attributes of God signify Nothing real, nor false, nor any Opinion of our Brains; and are not sufficient Premises to infer Truth, or convince Falshood. And the Name of God (he saith) is used, not to make us Conceive him, but that we may Honour him. And he elsewhere saith, (d) That those that venture to discourse Philosophically of the Nature of God, or to reason of his Nature from his Attributes, losing their Understanding in the very first attempt, fall from one Inconvenience to another, without end or number, and do only discover their Astonishment and Rustiness. This Bold Writer doth in another place tell us, (e) That God must not be said to be Finite; and so being neither Finite nor Infinite, he must be nothing at all: Which is the very same Dilemma that the Sceptick, Sextus Empiricus, (f) makes use of against a Deity. Another Modern Author of the same stamp, tells us, That he that calls any thing Infinite,

(a) Hobbs's Leviathan, p. 51.

(c) *Leviath.* p. 11, 190.
(d) *Leviath.* Par. iv. c. 46.
(e) *Leviath.* Par. iv. c. 46.
(f) *Adv. Math.* p. 374.

doth but, *Rei quam non capit attribuere nomen quod non Intelligit*; "Give an unintelligible Name to a thing which he doth not understand." All which agrees exactly with what *Sextus* also saith, in many places of his Book; and whom these Gentlemen follow pretty closely in most things, without taking any notice at all of him.

Now to this, I return; That as 'tis very foolish and precarious, to deny the Existence of a God, because He is not an Object of our Bodily Senses; so, to conclude, that there is no such Being, from our not being able perfectly to comprehend Him, and to have a true and adequate Idea of him, is equally absurd and unaccountable. For at this rate, we may soon come to deny the Existence of most things in Nature, since there are very many of which we do not adequately comprehend the Nature of, and know all that is to be known about them. There is ἀνα-
τάλαντον τι, something Incomprehensible in the Nature of all things. Are there not a thousand Beings, which we are sure are truly and actually existent in Nature, the manner of whose Operation and Action we cannot comprehend, and whose *Phænomena* we cannot Philosophically explain? Let any of these Penetrating Gentlemen try their Skill at *Gravity, Light, Sound, Magnetism and Electricity*, and oblige the World with such an adequate Account of any one of them, as shall make all impartial and curious Men acquiesce in it as satisfactory. Let him clearly shew us how his own *Sensations* are made; how the *Circulation of the Blood* first begins, and continues its *Vital Tour* round his Body; how *Pestilential and Contagious Diseases* first invade and are propagated; how
several

several Medicines, that may be properly enough call'd *Specificks*, operate; and particularly, how the *Cortex Peruviana* cures an Intermitting Fever: In a word, let him tell us how his own *Body* (setting aside Accidents) *decays*, *grows old*, and *dies*, when the same *Digestions* and *Assimulations* are made to Day, as were Yesterday, and there is no apparent defect in the Nutriment of any one part of it. He that can account for these, and many other such like things, which are obvi-ous to every one's daily Observation, will certainly approve himself to be a Man of very curious and acute Thought, and of very deep Insight into Nature: and when he hath fully convinced me, that he thoroughly *comprehends* the Nature of but these few things, I will allow that he hath some ground to disbelieve the Existence of whatever appears to him Incomprehensible. But if a Person will candidly own, as he that hath any *Knowledge* and *Modesty* must do, That there are many things in the History of Nature, of which he cannot meet with a satisfactory Solution and Explication; he hath certainly no manner of reason to disbelieve the Existence of a God, on the same account; and to say, There is no such Thing, because his Nature is Incomprehensible to our finite and imperfect Capacities. *We cannot, by searching, find out God, nor discover the Almighty unto perfection, Job xi. 7.*

But again; There is a vast difference between *Apprehending* and *Comprehending* of a thing; between knowing a thing really to be, and knowing all that is possible to be known about that thing. We cannot indeed perfectly comprehend the Nature of God, because we have shallow, limited, finite and imper-

fect Capacities and Faculties ; and the Deity contains in himself all possible Perfection. Every one must grant, that 'tis impossible the *lesser* should contain and comprehend the *greater*, especially too when the Extent and Fulness of one, Infinitely exceeds the Capacity of the other. From hence therefore to infer that we can have no *Idea* nor *Knowledge at all* of God, is very absurd and incongruous. 'Tis a strange Method of Arguing, that I can know nothing at all of a thing, because I can't know every particular that belongs to it ; and he would deservedly be esteemed a Madman, that should deny that there is any such thing as the Sun, because he cannot tell how many Miles he is in Diameter, how far he is from us, and which way he comes by a supply of Matter to continue his enlivening Fire and Heat. When some great and advantageous Revolution is brought about in any Nation ; when the Publick Good is secured, the Laws and Liberties preserved, and Confusion, Bloodshed, and Misery of all Kinds, prevented, by the wise and deep Council and Conduct of Him, or Those that are at the Helm of Affairs : Would it not be gross Stupidity, for a Man to assert, That all this came about by Chance, and that there was no Wisdom nor Conduct, that so opportunely managed all things ; only because he cannot penetrate into all the secret Steps and Methods of it, and see all the hidden Springs, by which it was moved regularly on to its intended Perfection ? There are many things whose Existence 'twould be ridiculous to doubt of, whose Nature and Qualities we are very far from being able perfectly to Comprehend and Explain. And amongst the rest, there is nothing but
our

our own Existence, that we can be more assured of, than that there is a God. For as to all Objects of Sense, we may, as Monsieur *Des Cartes* shews, have some reason to doubt of their actual Existence without us, till we are first satisfied that our Senses do not deceive us: Till we know this, for any thing we can demonstratively prove to the contrary, all sensible Objects may be meer Phantasms and Delusions, and nothing but the internal Configurations of our own Brains, and the result of Imagination and Fancy. But when once we are assured that there is a God, who is perfectly Knowing, Wise, and Good, we shall discover that He can be no Deceiver; we shall find that 'tis not suitable to the Idea we have of Him, that He should delude and cheat us with false Appearances; and consequently we may well conclude, that he hath appointed our Senses to be proper Judges of their own Objects, and that those Things are actually existing without us, whose Idea's we so plainly perceive in our selves, and which we truly judge to be so.

And if we will impartially consult our own Thoughts, and reason clearly from those Idea's that we have within us; I think, we may most demonstratively be assured of the Existence of a God, and that He is such a most Perfect or Infinite Being, as the Sacred Scriptures and Divines describe Him to be. I will allow that the greatest Certainty that we can have of the Existence of any thing, is of our own Being; of which, as I have already said, no one can possibly doubt: for whatsoever can *Think*, *reason*, *doubt*, *will*, and *determine*, must needs be *Something*, and have a *true and real Being*. And because we find by this means, that there is certainly
something

something actually existing; it will plainly follow, that something or other must always have been so: for if ever there was a time when there was *Nothing*, there never could have been any thing at all: for absolute *Nothing* could never have *done*, or *produced any thing*. Something therefore ('tis plain) must have been always, or eternally existing, and which never could have had any beginning. For if it ever had any beginning, tho' never so many Thousands of Millions of Ages ago, it must have then began from meer *Nothing*, which 'tis impossible for any Man to conceive. Now, if we consider our selves, or any things else that are round about us in the world; we shall plainly find, that neither we nor *they*, can be this thing that always was existent, and which we have discovered must have been without beginning; for we know well enough, that it was but a little while ago when we began to be, and that 'tis but a short space before we shall die, and cease to be in this World any more. Besides, we find in our selves, and discover in things without us, such Defects, Limitations and Imperfections, as sufficiently must convince us, that neither we nor they can be Independent Beings, nor indeed the Cause of one another's Existence. We must therefore in our Thoughts have recourse to some *first Cause* or *Origin*, from whence all things do proceed: And that there must be some *first Cause*, or some *Being*, which produced both our selves and the things that are round about us in the World, we cannot but be assured of, for we know, nothing can cause, or make it self to be; and we see that we cannot make or produce each other; and we perceive that none of our Forms or Modes

Modes of Existence are Indestructible and Eternal; but that all things are continually fitting and changing: some improving and increasing, while others are decreasing and dying. The *common Matter*, indeed, of all Bodies will remain, and we do not find it to be perishable, as their forms are; But then, *this* we may easily know cannot be the first Cause of all other Things; since we have no Idea of its being an *Active, Intelligent, Wise, and Powerful Being*, as that must be; but the Notion we have of it is, that it is *ἄλῃ πᾶς ἐχούσα*, *purely Passive, and obsequiously Capable of all variety of Forms and Motions*; as I shall hereafter more largely shew. If we farther carefully consider of this Being, that we have thus found must have eternally been or existed; we shall find also, that it must for ever continue *to be for the time to come*; for we cannot imagine, how a Being that hath Eternally existed for the time past, should ever terminate or cease to be for the time to come; since there is nothing in its *self*, or in any thing *without it*, that can possibly be the Cause of its Destruction. Such a Being therefore will be properly Eternal, and necessarily Self-existent, without Beginning or End, or any Possibility of Dying or Ceasing to be. Such a Being also, must on this Account, be the *Creator, Author, and Cause* of all things: because, nothing can be the Cause of it self; and therefore they must either be Eternal and Necessarily Self-existent, as we are assured they are not; or else derived from, and produced by this Eternal and Infinite Being. And as the Beings themselves are derived from, and produced by this Eternal and Self-existent Being, so must all their *Perfections and Qualifications* too: for they

they are indeed the most Noble Things in their Natures. *Knowledge* therefore, and *Wisdom*, *Thought* and *Reasoning*, and all the excellent Powers and Faculties that are found in any Creatures, must come from the same Power that produced those Beings and Natures in which they are inherent. And if these Excellencies and Perfections are derived from this Necessarily existent Being, they must certainly be in Him in the greatest Perfection: for if they were not in Him, they could not be derived from him; since 'tis unconceivable that any thing can give or communicate to another, either what it hath not it self, or a greater degree of any thing than it is Master of. This Eternal and Self-existent Being therefore must have in it, and that in the utmost Perfection, all the Excellencies that we admire and value in any other things. It must have the Power of doing all things that are possible to be done, and therefore be *Almighty*; it must know all things that are possible to be known, and therefore be *Omniscient*: In a word, it must be *All-Wise* and *Good*, *Just* and *True*, *Merciful* and *Gracious*, and contain in it all possible Excellencies and Perfections. Now this may very well pass for a Description of the Deity; and 'tis such an One as is very Intelligible and Plain to the meanest Capacity that can but think at all. And it gives us such an Idea of God, as we see is easily attainable by an obvious and familiar Chain of Consequences, and which puts our Minds not at all on the wrack to conceive. As for the word *Infinite*, which is often applied to God, and which these Gentlemen quarrel so much at, and of which they affirm, that it is *impossible to have any Conception*

Conception or Idea ; I say, that it is groundlessly and precariously asserted : and that nothing but the wilful Darkness and Confusion which they have brought upon their own Minds can make it appear Unintelligible. For as the Excellent Dr. *Cudworth* hath proved the *Idea* that we have of *Infinite*, is the same with that which we have of *Perfection*. And therefore when we say, that God is Infinite in Power, Wisdom or Goodness, we mean by it, that He is most perfectly or compleatly so; and that he wants nothing which is necessary to render Him most Perfect, and Excellent in that Respect of which we speak of Him. Now a Being that any way is Deficient or Imperfect, and that hath not all the possible Excellencies that are to be had, is Finite, and that in the same proportion as it is defective. Thus, for Instance, those Beings which endure but for a time, which had a Beginning, and will have an end, are finite or imperfect, as to their existence : But GOD, who *is*, *was*, and *is to come*, who is and will be from *Everlasting* to *Everlasting*, He is properly said to be *Infinite* (a) or *Perfect*, as to Existence or Duration. For there is no Restriction, Limitation or Imperfection in His Nature, in this respect, as there is in that of all Creatures whatever. A Being whose Power extends to but a few things, is very imperfect or finite in Power ; and if there be any Possible thing that it cannot do, 'tis still so far imperfect in Power. But a Being that can do all things that are not contradictory to his Nature, or all possible things, is properly said to be *Infinite* or *Perfect* in Power, or *Almighty* ; so a Being that knows

(a) Τὸ ὅ ἀίδιον ἀπὸ τῆς
καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς ; καὶ
ὅτι ὁ ἀρχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς
Sext. Empir. adv. Math. pag.
150.

all things possible to be known, is Infinite or Perfect in Knowledge: and the like of any other Attributes or Perfections: In all, the Comparison or Proportion is the same. A Being that wants no degree of Excellency or Perfection is God: *Infinite in Power, Wisdom, Justice, Goodness and Truth.* But if a Being want any one, or any degree or proportion of These Things, it is Finite and Imperfect, and that in the same degree or Proportion. Now, where is the *Inconceivableness, Confusion, Absurdity, and Nonsense* of all This? is it not as easie to conceive or apprehend that a Being may have in his Nature all possible Perfection, as it is to have an Idea of one that is Imperfect and Deficient? for how comes the Idea of Imperfection into our Mind? how come we to know that a Thing is Finite, Defective and Limited, unless we have also an Idea or Notion of Infinity or Perfection? how can we know what is wanting in any Being, unless we have an Idea of it, that it is in some other Being? Most certain therefore it is, that we may have as true and clear an Idea of the Existence of a God, as of any thing in Nature: (b) and in Fact it is most notoriously true, that a clear and distinct Notion that there is such a Being, hath and doth still appear in the Minds of all Mankind; and it is impressed there, I doubt not, by the *peculiar Care* of that Divine and Merciful Being Himself.

(b) *Vid.*
Mr. Lock's Essay of Understanding, P. IV.
Ch. X.

And therefore those that assert, that we have not, nor can have any Notion or Idea of a God, nor of his Attributes and Perfections, and that on *that Account* deny his Existence; discover such wretched Ignorance as well as Obstinacy, that they are really a
Disgrace

Disgrace to Humane Nature. For pretending to be *over-Wise*, they become *Fools*, they are *vain in their Imaginations*, and *their foolish heart is darkened*; Their vicious Inclinations have debauched their Reason and Understanding: And *though God be not far from every one of us*, since *in Him we live, move, and have our being*; yet their Wickedness and Pride is such, That *they will not seek after God, neither is God in all their Thoughts*. From which wilful Blindness and Stupidity, may the God of Truth deliver them, by the gracious Illuminations of his Blessed Spirit; To whom, with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, be all Honour and Glory, &c.

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8

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